

*Commentary***Bio cultural approach and its history**

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ABOUT THE STUDY

Bio cultural theory, which is related to the anthropological concept of holism, combines biological and social/cultural anthropology. While acknowledging that “the term bio cultural can have a variety of meanings and represent a variety of methods, research areas, and levels of analysis,” one working definition of bio cultural anthropology is “a critical and productive dialogue between biological and cultural theories and methods in answering key anthropology questions”. The use of a theoretical lens through which illness and embodiment are interwoven might be understood as using a bio cultural framework. This perspective considers local, cultural perspectives on illness and disease as well as local traditional or biomedical therapeutic approaches. This integrative effort necessitates a strong focus on methodology as well as openness to many, often conflicting theoretical frameworks. A bio cultural viewpoint on health and healing examines how a culture represents the sickness they experience as a result of the disease.

As a result, a bio cultural approach may be thought of as feedback loop in which cultural factors and biological interact; biology permits certain behaviors to exist, and these behaviors, in turn, impact biological attributes. Healing becomes a cultural product, something that makes meaning within a certain cultural context, when both the biological and cultural implications of sickness and embodiment are understood. Bio cultural study entails taking into account how cultures approach health and healing in relation to gender, class, age, education and their own traditional experiences with disease and healing.

Bio cultural research can be approached in three ways they are:

- Biological approach-This approach emphasizes evolution and how it affects illness.
- Cultural approach-Culture is important. This method focuses on how sickness is interpreted and explained.

- Critical approach-They say that ‘Inequality matters’. This method focuses on how social disparity influences illness.

History

The origins of anthropology: 20th century American anthropology stressed a holistic, four-field approach to the study of human existence under the influence of Franz Boas and a number of his early disciples. Holism is “overarching and integrative,” covering “history, present, and future; biology, society, language, and culture,” and assuming “interrelationship among aspects of a topic.” Anthropologists were encouraged to undertake training and research that merged the cultural, biological, archaeological, and linguistic subfields of anthropology as a result of this emphasis.

Cultural/Biological split: Divisions have emerged between biological and cultural anthropologists in reaction to criticisms that four-field holism is essentially a 19th century anthropological product. Some departments, such as Stanford University’s highly publicized divide into departments of “Cultural and Social Anthropology” and “Anthropological Sciences” in 1998, totally separated due to these schisms. Despite the fact that the department has been restructured and some of these ideological divides are narrowing, there is still discussion in this area.

Adaptation: Researchers analyze the history of bio cultural anthropology in “Building a new bio cultural synthesis.” They point out that research in the 1960’s and 1970’s concentrated on an adaptation paradigm to better comprehend human biological variety. The adaptation paradigm proposed that individuals strive to modify or cope with problems in their physical and social contexts through genetic, developmental, physiological and sociocultural adaptations. Livingstone’s work revealing the adaptive nature of sickle cell anaemia in high malaria areas is an example of this sort of study.

While this approach attempted to merge biology and culture, it was not without criticism. Typically, characteristics of environments and organisms were studied as independent

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and dependent variables, with the environment serving as a source of challenges and the organism being reduced to a set of distinct qualities or responses. However, because biology and culture are dialectically interwoven, these sorts of studies have

been labelled as fundamentally reductionist. Another criticism leveled at the adaptation paradigm was that it failed to account for political and economic influences in its assessments.